

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY SPECIAL ISSUE

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NICARAGUA TODAY

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A woman's place is in the revolution

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This issue of *Nicaragua Today* is a special women's issue — to coincide with International Women's Day. The special features commence on this page with impressions from a visit to Nicaragua by Dawn Primarolo MP. Other features are on pages 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11.

In May 1988, four women Labour MPs, Alice Mahon, Dawn Primarolo, Maria Fyfe and Audrey Wise spent two weeks in Nicaragua. During their stay, they met with women ranging from the Vice-President of the National Assembly (equivalent of our Parliament) to peasant women in the remote war-ravaged Rio Coco. They also visited Nicaragua's Atlantic Coast. Audrey Wise, an active member of the Central America Labour Group, had visited Nicaragua once before in 1984. This time round, she was struck by the new confidence and sense of identity amongst Nicaraguan women compared to four years ago. 'In 1984, women mainly talked about defending the revolution,' she says. 'Now they are also putting forward their own specific demands.' Dawn Primarolo's account of the visit is printed below.

Women have a voice

'The most striking experience for me was the public testimonial we attended in Managua on Mother's Day. In front of a banner stating that "The mothers and the people are the defenders of the right to peace", sat Comandante Luis Carrion, a prominent leader of the FSLN. Hundreds of women from all the regions in Nicaragua came to the meeting, each one holding a rose. Many gave their own public testimonies. Some spoke of the hardships they faced, some criticised the government, some spoke of their missing family and friends kidnapped by the contras, but all of them spoke of the urgent need for peace. It was a very moving experience.

The Comandante sat and listened for three hours. Had that meeting been held in Britain we couldn't imagine a man listening so intently without interrupting. At the end of the women's testimonies, the Comandante responded, explaining the aims of the government and acknowledging all the views expressed. This public testimony gave women the opportunity to speak directly to the government. It was just one example of the attention paid to women's views in Nicaragua and the central role they play in the revolution.

Women central to the revolution

It is true that machismo is still very prominent in Nicaragua, but so too is it dominant in Britain. All of us women are exposed to the pressure of what is considered to be our prime role as 'carers'. Economically, poli-

Women speaking for themselves



Women literacy teachers made up 43% of the literacy brigades.

tically and socially, we are all treated as second class citizens. The difference in Nicaragua is that the Sandinistas have at least recognised that a revolution cannot succeed without the full involvement and commitment of women as equal participants in radical social change.

Gaining confidence

AMNLAE, the Nicaraguan women's movement, positively encourages women to express their feelings and demands. Through this process, sexism is being actively confronted. Women's fundamental rights to economic independence, protection from sexual violence, and control of their own bodies are now being taken on board, even if they cannot be immediately achieved.

Nicaraguan women are represented in every sector, including the armed forces. Thousands learnt to read and write in the literacy campaigns, an experience which has

given them a self-confidence they never used to have. Women we met not only seemed confident in themselves but also held positive views about building a better future in which they would actively participate, despite all the massive problems currently facing Nicaragua. We spoke with women whose sons, husbands, daughters and sisters had been kidnapped or killed by the US-backed contra forces. While vividly expressing their pain and anguish, they were still full of hope in the desire to achieve peace.

As we prepare to celebrate International Women's Day on 8 March, it seems wholly appropriate that we should sing the praises of Nicaraguan women, and that we should not only support their achievements but also learn from their experiences and reflect on what we can do to help sustain their struggle."

Dawn Primarolo MP

**WOMEN
& THE
Revolution**

Editorial: Virginia Ellis

After the hurricane the recovery. Pictured here, a team at work restoring electricity in — El Rama. See hurricane updates and Appeal response on pages 12 & 13.

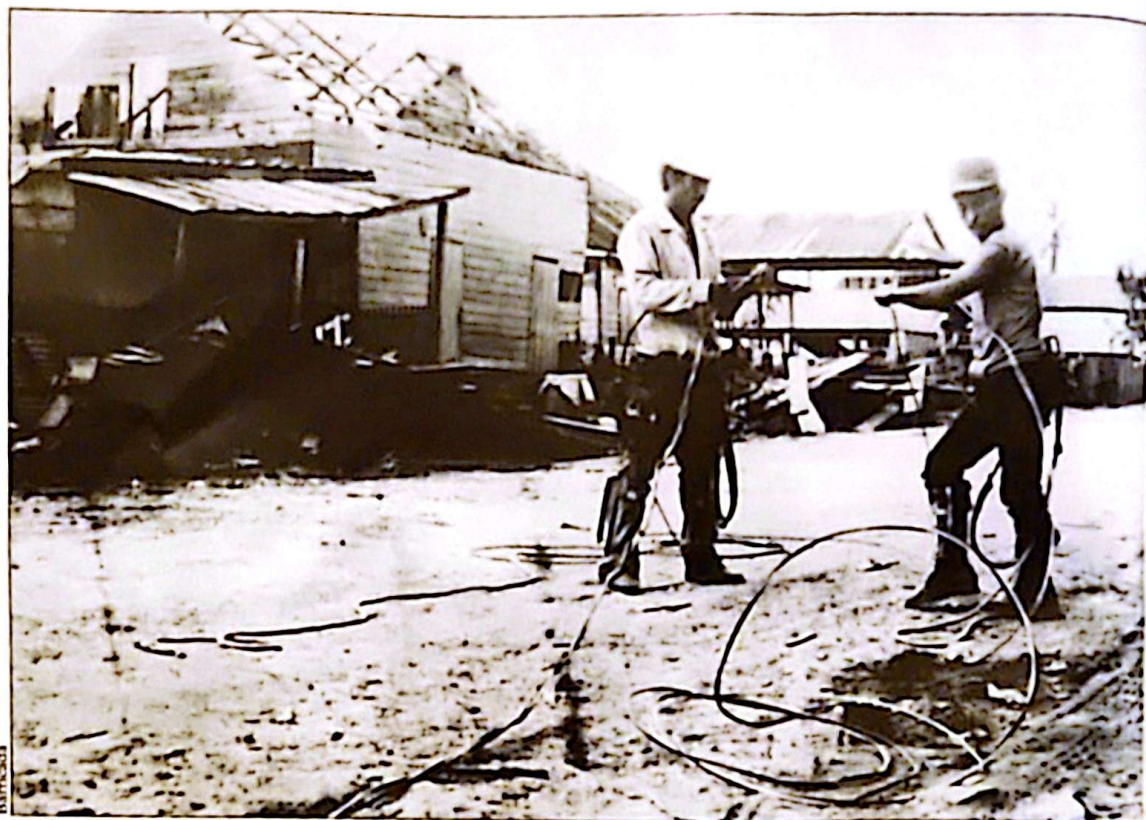
THE ECONOMY

THE NICARAGUAN economy is in a critical state. The economic research team of the Managua based Regional Coordinator for Economic and Social Investigations, CRIES, has made a sobering analysis of what it will take for Nicaragua to recover. With an annual economic growth rate of 3% — a figure difficult to achieve even under much better conditions — it would take 10 years to return to the already low economic levels of 1987. Combining the consequences of the war, the US economic embargo and the hurricane, CRIES estimates that it would take 17 years to return to the economic levels of 1979. These figures do not take into account the present annual 3% population growth rate.

This herculean task could have been eased somewhat if international relief aid after the hurricane had been more substantial. By early December, the figure for aid received was running near \$35 million, a significant amount but still not nearly enough to deal with even the immediate damage caused by the storm.

On top of this the recent UN Economic Commission report believed that the hurricane would have an effect on the country's inflation. Recent figures indicate that inflation is already rising at a phenomenal rate, probably around 26,000%.

This obviously has a considerable effect on purchasing power, with price increases for basic goods soaring above the wage rises workers have received. But whilst the government has to spend more than half the national budget on defence it will be impossible to concentrate sufficient resources on the economy. ●



SOCIAL COST: SOME PEOPLE GIVE UP

ONE RESULT of the deteriorating economic situation is that some Nicaraguans are deciding to leave their country and emigrate to the US and Canada. Opposition forces have tried to take advantage of this situation, even resorting to

using radio stations to broadcast a message stating that Canada would receive all those who wanted to emigrate with open arms.

This is far from the truth. Canada has recently ended the free entry of Nicaraguans, and in Miami they are specifically

trying to stop an influx of Nicaraguans lured by the false promise of the United States.

This drain of people has its own negative effect by increasing the shortage of trained personnel available and making it more difficult to increase production levels. ●

OPPOSITION HOLD SMALL DEMONSTRATION

THE LEADERS of the opposition in Nicaragua recently organised a march through the streets of Managua in protest at the economic situation. They were a motley crew, ranging in ideology from the Nicaraguan Communist Party to the Democratic Conservative Party.

Despite the march being supported by no less than 14 opposition parties, and the fact that the Reagan Administration had given \$26,000 to the organisers to mount the protest (illegal under Nicaraguan law), less than 6,000 people turned

up. When asked about the low turnout they blamed it on the radio transmission of a Nicaraguan All-Stars baseball game. ●

END THE TRADE EMBARGO

THE SAME opposition who organised the poorly attended march in Managua are taking up a long held Sandinista demand and calling for an end to the US trade embargo. They now claim that its imposition was a mistake in the first place and that 'the new administration should dump it.'

The embargo, which was



This ship was left high and dry after the floods which followed the Hurricane on the Rio Escondido.

imposed in 1985, has had a serious effect on the economy, with many goods in scarce supply and serious shortages for producers and farmers who rely on replacement parts from the US. However, in its prime aim of deposing the government, the embargo has quite clearly failed. ●

SWARM

AS IF IT wasn't enough to face earthquakes, contras and hurricanes, the population of Managua is encountering a new terror: killer bees. In two recent incidents, 14 people have been badly stung and two killed after swarms had been disturbed.

The bees are the product of an experiment that went wrong. In the 50's, a Brazilian scientist attempted to increase the honey production of local bees by crossing them with high honey-yielding imported African bees. It was believed that the cross between the docile South American and the aggressive African bees would produce a docile honey-producing crossbreed.

Unfortunately 20 of the African Queen bees escaped, reproduced freely with the local bees and passed on both their honey-producing qualities and their aggressive nature. Swarms of these bees have been moving north over the past thirty years.

With all the ingredients for a Hollywood film, the only happy ending is that the bees are increasing the production of Nicaraguan honey and helped win a gold medal from Belgium for its quality. ●

PRIEST OF THE PEOPLE

AN ITALIAN priest has refused to obey a Vatican order to leave Nicaragua.

Urbaldo Gervasoni has said he believes the order stemmed from the 'covert connection between some bishop and the counter-revolution.' He accused the Church hierarchy of 'persecuting priests who are in solidarity with the people, and soiling their hands with the blood of the people. ●



No light matter — dealing with the bees.

HONDURAS IN THE DOCK

THE INTERNATIONAL Court of Justice has ruled unanimously that Nicaragua is entitled to take Honduras to court with regard to the contra's based in Honduras who are carrying out attacks across the border in Nicaragua. However the wheels of international justice run slowly and no date has been set for a full hearing of the case. ●



US IMPOSES VISA BAN

IN DECEMBER, Daniel Ortega had to cancel a visit to the UN in New York following visa restrictions imposed by the US. The US Administration had required 15 day's notice to process the visas, refused to issue visas for 14 of the party and failed to grant permission for the President to visit the home of the Nicaraguan ambassador.

At a news conference, President Ortega explained that he could not accept the rules imposed by the US 'because the United States cannot decide when, how and with whom a chief of state can visit an international organisation like

the UN.'

This incident, combined with the refusal of a visa to PLO leader Yasser Arafat, has led to calls for clarification from the UN on its relation with the host country. ●

NORTH - CHARGES DROPPED

THE MAJOR charges of conspiracy and theft against Oliver North have been dropped. His lawyers played a sharp move in calling both Reagan and Bush to the stand and by asking for many classified documents to be released.

The move means that the chance of anything new or revealing coming out in open court with regard to the Contragate scandal is remote.

Nevertheless, North still faces charges of making false statements, shredding and altering government documents, obstructing Presidential and Congressional enquiries in to the Iran/Contra affair, and conspiracy to defraud the Internal Revenue Service. He is also accused of converting traveller's cheques received in his government job to personal use and illegally accepting a \$13,800 home security system from another defendant, Richard E Secord. These charges may still land North in jail and kill forever his 'wounded patriot' image. ●

STEVE HERMAN

Everyone at the NSC has been deeply shocked to hear of the sudden death of Steve Herman in February. Steve was in Nicaragua when he died, implementing a training programme to train Nicaraguan technicians working for Sandinista TV (SSTV).

As a film and video maker, Steve had been involved in solidarity work for Nicaragua for many years. An active trade unionist in the ACTT, he had been a key member of that union's Nicaragua Committee since its inception, assisting their many projects, including the successful container appeal which sent over £25,000 of tapes and other materials to SSTV and other media organisations in Nicaragua.

With the assistance of the ACTT Nicaragua Committee, Steve produced and directed the video *Las Cien Mil Millas de Mayo* for the NSC, a documentary of the second London-Oxford bike ride and solidarity work in Britain which has been shown a number of times on SSTV in Nicaragua.

He also directed a video programme for the Arts for Nicaragua Fund, featuring Father Ernesto Cardenal's readings at the Royal Court Theatre, and he was an active member of the Lambeth-Bluefields Twinning Group.

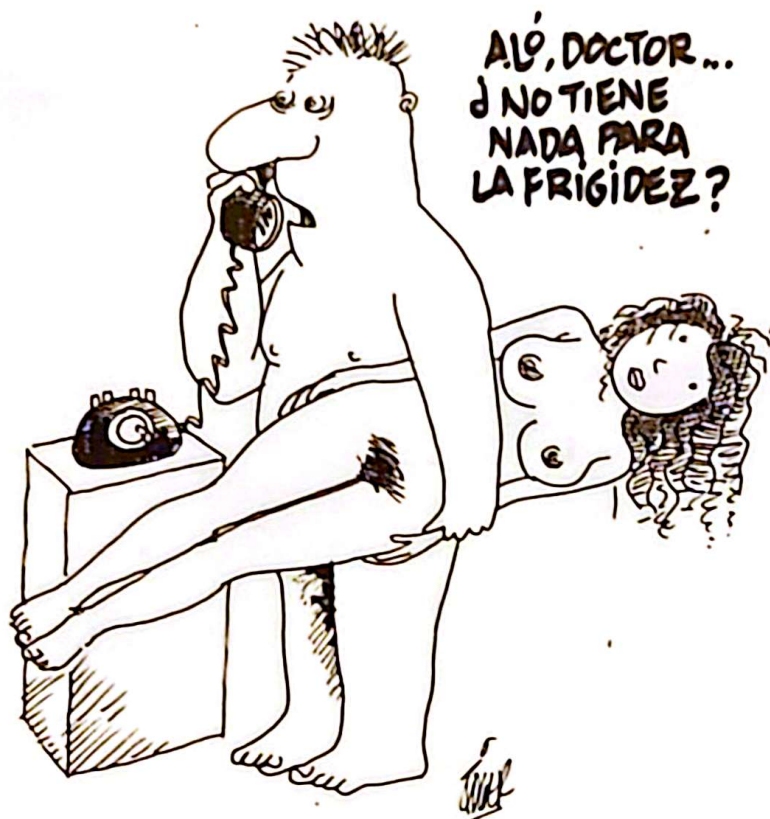
But a list of his achievements does not convey the full extent of our loss. Steve was notable for his infectious enthusiasm and the overwhelming commitment he put into his work. It is often hard in solidarity work to keep going, to look for that extra bit of funding, to ask for that extra favour, to fit in that extra bit of work. Steve always managed this, and always with a smile on his face.

He will be greatly missed by everyone he worked with in the NSC. This year's London-Oxford Bike Ride will be dedicated to his name. ●

Dave Kitson

Comics and censors

Nicaraguan women hoping for positive images of women in their media have good reason to be optimistic. The first Provisional Media Law, passed in 1979, explicitly bans the commercial exploitation of women's bodies in the press, on television and on film, and the FSLN's *Proclama* of 1987 further specifies that the Frente Sandinista is committed to promoting positive and respectful images of women in the media.



Translation: 'Hello Doctor . . . Don't you have anything for frigidity?' An example of *Semana Comica*'s portrayal of women.

A dramatic test of these policies occurred in March 1988 when the satirical weekly *La Semana Comica* published a photograph of a woman shaving her pubic hair, with the caption 'Women get ready! It looks like this International Women's Day will be well celebrated . . . In the photo, one activist getting ready'.

AMNLAE, seeing this as a direct contravention of the 1979 law, led a delegation of women to the Ministry of Interior's Media Office to demand action against the magazine. It was a delicate situation. Firstly, the Sandinista government was particularly sensitive about censorship, having already been accused by the opposition of muzzling the press, and secondly, *La Semana Comica* was very popular as a result of its biting, and often very funny, satire. By attacking the magazine, the AMNLAE women laid themselves open to the classic counter-attack against 'humourless feminists who can't take a joke'.



Lea Guido, general secretary of AMNLAE, outraged by *Semana Comica*'s sexist 'humour'.

But AMNLAE received an encouraging response. The Sandinistas shut down *La Semana Comica* for five weeks and additionally ordered

the pro-government *El Nuevo Diario*, which had reproduced the offending photograph in its coverage of the debate, to close down for three days.

Back in publication, *La Semana Comica* proceeded to ridicule censorship, and 'bitter and frustrated' feminists in particular. Photographs of naked women reappeared with elaborate captions to justify their status as jokes. The Media Office took up the challenge and, in August, suspended the magazine indefinitely, with the statement: 'Subordinated images wound women and do not contribute to the emancipation of women or men'.

Public debate raged and *La Semana Comica* soon reopened. But the point had been made.

Foreign bodies

Nicaragua's commitment to positive images of women runs up against an intractable obstacle when it comes to the country's dependence on imported images, with 70% of its television and over 90% of its films coming from abroad. Nicaragua does not have the resources to compete against a flood of sophisticated foreign media, but the state television and cinema authorities make considerable efforts to select the most appropriate material and cut the most offensive scenes from individual shows.

Home-grown productions

The country's own programmes are not always perfect, but sometimes they show real flair for screening more realistic and heartening images of women. INCINE's 1987 feature film *Mujeres de la Frontera* is a case in point, the heroes being a group of women who successfully establish a cooperative farm in the war zone near the Honduran border while their menfolk are away fighting.

Ways forward

One limitation is the lack of women trained and working in technical grades in television, but on the other hand a majority of journalists, in all areas of the Nicaraguan press, are women. They have familiar complaints — a lack of child-care facilities at work and condemnation of bikini-clad women in the daily papers. When asked what positive images these women want, the famous photograph of a Nicaraguan woman, with a big smile, an AK47 rifle over one shoulder and a baby at her breast, is most often mentioned. 'But does it limit our value? Does it demand too much from women?'; their debates continue. ●

Lucinda Broadbent

Dona, 30 years old, lives with her 3 children, ages 14, 5 and 18 months. As a *socia* (full member) of the co-op, she gets paid an *ayuda* (help) for her work on the land, and though this is not a wage it is a small contribution to the family's meagre economy. Annual profits and daily milk should be forthcoming once the co-op becomes established.

Dona Antonia's day starts at 4am when she rises in the dark to rekindle the stove with dry *lena* (firewood) which lights easily in the hot ashes. There is no electricity in the house. By the light of the fire she then starts to grind clean boiled maize for the morning tortillas. These are one of the staple foods of Nicaragua — unleavened pancakes made from maize and water. The maize is ground once (either on a mortar & pestle system, or hand-operated mill) coarsely, then mixed with water and ground again to a fine paste. This is rolled into small balls and then patted out into pancakes, size and thickness varying according to who makes them. By the time these are ready for cooking on a metal plate over the fire, beans and rice, if there are any, will have been reheated.



Making tortillas

For much of the six months I was living in Antonia's community there was little food available, crops having failed, with many people living on nothing but tortillas, salt and unsweetened black coffee.

While Dona Antonia prepares breakfast the oldest child helps the younger ones to get up and then goes to collect the first water of the day. Fetching water is a major daily task, the spring being a quarter of a mile away down a steep slope. She makes the journey constantly, accompanied by her children, carrying a large container of water on her head, hip or shoulder. Daily she and the children carry clothes to the spring, scrub them on a pair of stones set out for this purpose, carry them back wet and hang them to dry over the barbed wire fence.

In term time the eldest child goes to school at 8.45am, leaving Dona Antonia to care for the other two children and to tend the animals. They have a milking cow and calf which need perpetual chasing, seeking out or roping in. Having a few chickens and the cow buffers the household from the effects of crop failure, enabling

Dona Antonia

A day in the life of a Campesina

Dona Antonia lives on a beef-producing agricultural co-op near Matiguas. Displaced by the war, she hid for days with her children in the monte (scrub), after her village was attacked and destroyed by the contra. She was relocated by the FSLN to a newly organised co-operative.

ling them to have a little cheese or an egg with their tortillas. Dona Antonia, herself, tries to get to school for afternoon 'adult classes' being unable to either read or write. She is keen, but domestic and land work demands usually prevent her attending.

Antonia also worked regularly mixing concrete, digging holes and did carpentry during the six months I worked on construction projects in the co-op, building a school, 20 houses and a Comedor — a collective cooking and eating place.

During school holidays the oldest child looks after the younger two, thus freeing Dona Antonia to do more work on the land and so enabling her to earn a little more money. Apart from housework and child care, women also carry out much of the work on the land, primarily planting, clearing and harvesting the crops. Additionally Dona Antonia, along with 10 other women, is in the process of organising a *hortaliza* (market garden or allotment) in order to grow vegetables and fruit for the co-op and to secure a regular income for her household.

Not surprisingly Antonia is terrified of the contra and very nervous when the war comes too close. As a religious woman she attributes most things to God, rather than taking a more political stance, but she is a staunch supporter of the Sandinistas. She has great hopes for the future — seeing her children being educated and collectively owning land. She knows that once the war is over life can only improve. ●

Frances Hollis

**WOMEN
& THE
Revolution**

Women in action

Frontiers — Women and Revolution in Nicaragua

— A new NSC publication to be launched in Feminist Book Fortnight, June 1989.

This study of Nicaraguan women's lives not only looks at the war-torn frontier between Nicaragua and Honduras where the US-funded Counter-revolutionary military camps face campesino communities; but also at the more intimate frontiers between men and women inside Nicaragua, between women's specific demands and the demands of the nation's fight for survival.

Women in Britain have found that we have a lot to learn from the experience of our sisters in this distant country. The efforts they have made in rebuilding and defending their country, the priorities they have chosen and the difficulties they face in their lives, the conflicts between motherhood and participation in the revolution — all these can bring new insights to women's struggles here, and the international aspects of women's oppression and women's triumphs.

Frontiers has been written by a group of British and Irish women from the London Women for Nicaragua Group, with the aim of pulling together the available information on the place of women in the Nicaraguan Revolution. It is an update of the book, 'Sweet Ramparts' published by the NSC and War on Want in 1983 and now out of print. Both books were conceived in response to a vivid sense of solidarity between the women's movement in the two countries. The deeper our understanding becomes, the richer our solidarity grows.

Day of Solidarity with women in Nicaragua

Held at the London Women's Centre on 12 November, the Dayschool was a great success — with over 100 women attending. It was a terrific opportunity for the Women's Network, and others, to gather from as far afield as Scotland and exchange experiences, to become nostalgic about Nicaragua, to feel solidarity and to pass on to those who have not visited Nicaragua what life there is, and has been, like for women.

An instructive day for women less familiar with the situation in Nicaragua, it was also a chance to renew contacts and update ideas for solidarity work in Britain. Emphasis was made throughout the day on how women here can build on solidarity



Some of the women involved in the writing of *Frontiers*.

Nicaragua Must Survive Appeal

At the end of 1986 the Women's Container appeal was launched. The purpose has been to raise political support and to collect money to buy goods from the Nicaragua Must Survive list that are particularly relevant to women's lives. The appeal raised approximately £12,000 which has been used to buy cooking utensils and rolls of cloth suitable for making women's clothes. These items were sent to Nicaragua on a container that left in July, 1988.

The Women's Container Appeal has now been relaunched with new leaflets and posters. Nine years of military and economic aggression have resulted in a severe economic crisis. This means shortages of the most basic items which places a heavy burden particularly on women's lives. More than ever international

solidarity is vital to Nicaragua's survival. Money raised will be used to buy clothes, cooking utensils and cloth, zips and buttons for women's sewing co-operatives.

Women's Theatre for Nicaragua

Following her visit to Nicaragua with the 1988 NSC Women's Study Tour, Carole Grimshaw of Newcastle and several other women are now working on a theatre production which will tour Britain in the summer of this year. The play is being constructed out of the experiences of women from Britain who have spent time in Nicaragua — their impressions of the country, their expectations, and their feelings when they get back to Britain. This material is being interwoven with Nicaraguan legends and folklore which Carole herself collected in Nicaragua.

If you are a woman who has visited Nicaragua, the theatre group would like to hear about your experiences. Please send contributions to Carole Grimshaw, 251 Stanton Street, Newcastle-upon-Tyne NE4 5LJ.

Women's study tour to Nicaragua

The 1989 Women's Study Tour to Nicaragua will take place from 17 September - 3 October. The purpose of the tour is to strengthen links and show solidarity with Nicaraguan women and to broaden the work of the NSC Women's Network. The programme will include meetings at both local and national levels with the following subjects: women's health, training programmes, child care, sex education, AMNLAE, women in trade unions.

For more information contact the NSC office.

Lesbians in Nicaragua

In a revolution where it seems that every possible aspect of private and public life has become deeply politicised, the question of sexual orientation and homophobia remain under the surface — very few Nicaraguan lesbians regard their sexual practice as a political issue.

Speeches and documents from AMNLAE talk freely of 'sexuality' as a concern for the women's movement; but, so far, they mean *heterosexuality* — usually birth control and heterosexual sex education.

It goes without saying that there are lesbians in Nicaragua, like everywhere else. It can also be imagined how many of them suffer from isolation, oppression and self-hatred — again like anywhere else; compounded perhaps by their position in a Catholic-dominated *machista* society, and lacking the support of an organised lesbian movement or 'scene'. Housing conditions offer little privacy for sex, and women probably have less space to call their own.

However, the picture is not entirely grim. There is cause for celebration in all the relationships Nicaraguan women successfully enjoy with one another despite all the limitations imposed upon them. In many ways, Nicaragua is more sexually tolerant and open-minded than many other Latin American countries: the influence of the church is not as restrictive as its reputation, as evidenced by the fact that most heterosexual couples never get of-

ficially married. The Sandinista government, whilst not proffering any open support to lesbian activities, is certainly not carrying out any repression of homosexuals either; no Section 28 here.

Most important of all for the prospects of lesbian liberation in Nicaragua, it is undoubtedly true that the revolution has broken new ground in which there is more chance for any social transformation to take root and grow. A few indications, albeit small-scale and fragmentary in themselves, show that Nicaragua is ripe for the development of a strong and effective lesbian movement.

The first Latin American Lesbian Gathering was held in Mexico in October 1987. Five Nicaraguan lesbians attended (with financial support from British solidarity, among others) — it was a breakthrough in terms of Nicaraguans making contact with organised lesbian movements in their own continent. Many women went on directly from this event to the Fourth Latin American Feminist Conference, also in Mexico; among them was Rita Arauz from Nicaragua. She joined the 40-strong official Nicaraguan delegation to the Conference, made up of women from all sectors and areas of the country. Her participation as an 'out' lesbian, plus the high profile of lesbians from other countries in the workshops and discussions, forcefully introduced the issues of lesbian politics for the first time to a wide range of activists and

leaders in the Nicaraguan women's movement.

Subsequently, Lea Guido, General Secretary of AMNLAE, stated that although the lesbian struggle was not identical with women's struggle in general, 'lesbians march under their own banner', and on sex education: that 'I'm sure there will be space for lesbians, too, for everybody'.

At the Women and Legislation Conference in Managua in September 1988, a spontaneous workshop on lesbians and the law was organised. Daniel Ortega was asked about lesbians in Nicaragua by a delegate from Costa Rica at the '*de Cara al Pueblo*' rounding off the event: he confirmed publicly that there is no policy of discrimination against homosexuals or denial of their human rights.

Paradoxically, the most positive signs for lesbians in Nicaragua come from a project on AIDS. Motivated by their solidarity with gay men, some lesbians in Managua began in 1986-7 to participate in a very informal grouping of lesbian and gay friends holding discussions to try to educate themselves about the dangers of AIDS, spurred on by the efforts of lesbian and gay health brigadistas from San Francisco.

The Health Ministry MINSA realised that the community they had to mobilise this time was the gay community, so invited the members of the informal discussion group to a meeting, where they proposed that they form the basis of a new sex education project in conjunction with MINSA, with lesbians and gay men becoming health *brigadistas*, taking the message of safer sex to the whole gay community. It is an extraordinary example of cooperation between the state and grassroots lesbian and gay activists: we hope that the work of these *brigadistas* leads not only to a reduction in the spread of disease, but also the flowering of a new consciousness and pride among gay men and lesbians in Nicaragua. ●

Lucinda Broadbent

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— Lesbian and Gay Nicaragua AIDS Project

A new lesbian and gay solidarity group is starting in Britain. Our first project is to support Nicaragua's AIDS prevention education programme. We are hoping to invite a Nicaraguan lesbian from the programme to tour Britain. New members very welcome: contact us c/o the London Lesbian and Gay Centre, 67-69 Cowcross St, London EC1



Women in Nicaragua — the facts

Women tractor drivers from the Agricultural Workers Union in Jalapa near the Honduras border.

The *Proclama* of International Women's Day, 8 March 1987, is the FSLN's main policy document on the participation of women in the revolution and was the culmination of lengthy debates within the Party. We print an extract below:

- 'The struggle to wipe out discrimination against women cannot be separated from the struggle to defend the revolution . . . The solution of the specific problems of women . . . are questions which concern not only women, but all of society.
- We will continue investing our efforts and resources to aid the family, especially abandoned mothers, in the care of children, and to create conditions which facilitate their incorporation in productive and social tasks . . .
- We will continue to struggle against irresponsible paternity and the physical and moral abuse of women and children by promoting, on a social and institutional level, ever-stronger responses against those guilty of such conduct.
- We will promote an effective solidarity within the couple with respect to domestic chores and family responsibilities.
- The FSLN holds the firm conviction that these positions will be assumed by men and women, by all Nicaraguans, with the same determination that workers and youth have demonstrated in taking up military defence and production activities. Putting these positions into practice will multiply our moral and material forces in the battle which we wage today against foreign aggression.'

A few statistics

The following statistics point to a growing participation of women in the revolutionary process but also reflect the obstacles to such participation still posed by women's domestic burden.

Work

- A 1985 study found that women comprise about 35% of the permanent rural workforce. During the 1984/85 harvest women represented 70% of coffee pickers.

● It is estimated that the average *campesino* woman spends about 9.5 hours a day on household tasks. By comparison her husband and sons together devote a total of 50 minutes to domestic tasks.

● A study conducted in 1986 concluded that women in Managua devote 90% of their time to the mere business of survival — domestic chores, the search for essential food supplies, and paid work.

● In 1983 women comprised 42% of the urban economically active population (37% of industrial workers, 63% of those involved in commerce and 51% of service workers). This figure is likely to have increased since 1983 because of the number of men mobilised in the army to fight the contras.

Politics

- 31.4% of government leadership positions are held by women.

● Women comprise 67% of the membership of the Sandinista Defence Committee (local neighbourhood community committees). Over 40% of the membership of the Agricultural Workers' Union (ATC) are women.

"I feel my eyes are opening, I've found freedom working for this revolution and no-one can take that away. Once I never dared raise my hand and question what was going on. Now we question everything."

ALICIA ANDINO, WOMEN TOBACCO WORKER, JALAPA, QUOTED IN 'TIGER'S MILK', VIRAGO.

AMNLAE's aims in 1988-89

In 1988, AMNLAE, the Nicaraguan women's organisation, published a new 'Platform of Struggle' which contains a list of its priorities for the coming period. This was printed in its entirety in the national press and received widespread coverage. Here is an extract from the document:

'To make advances . . . an indispensable condition is to promote the participation of women in all the fields of political, economic and social life of the country . . . This will only be possible by fighting the causes of discrimination against women. For this, the movement raises the battle standards of women, identifying before society and the state the steps of this process of transformation:

1. To fight for national peace and dignity . . . which involves participating in military and economic defence.
2. To fight for the right of women to work, increasing access for women to all jobs without sex discrimination; access to land; and the right to equal pay for equal work. All this involves:
 - a) promoting the training and incorporation of women in technical and professional careers.



- b) fighting against sexual harassment in the workplace.
 - c) pre- and post-natal maternity pay.
 - d) paying attention to the hygiene and occupational health of women, particularly those who are pregnant or nursing.
3. To fight through a massive education campaign . . . for the eradication of all forms of violence and aggression against women, the physical, psychological and moral abuse of women, and the use of women as sexual and commercial objects.
 4. To fight for the sharing of domestic tasks between the members of the household, to encourage responsible fatherhood, to work for the creation of support structures such as workplace creches and communal laundries. . .
 7. To fight for a massive and systematic process of sexual education directed at both sexes, so that they understand their bodies, and the relations between men and women in the realm of sexuality . . .

The NSC Women's Network

This is an informal group of women in Britain who aim to build solidarity with women in Nicaragua and also to boost the participation of women in the British solidarity movement. While the Network was set up beneath the umbrella of the Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign, it is, in fact, open to *all* women, regardless of whether they are affiliated to the NSC. Meetings are held every three months in different parts of the country to exchange information and plan joint solidarity work.

Some women in the Network have set up local groups in their own areas, as in the case of London Women for Nicaragua and Twin Sisters in Manchester.

Campaigning and Fundraising

In December 1986 the Network launched a Container Appeal which has since raised nearly £12,000 worth of supplies and equipment for women in rural areas of Nicaragua. The Network also helps to organise the NSC women's study tour in which 15 British women participate each year. One of its main tasks has been to raise money to help pay for women who normally could not contemplate going on a two week tour of Nicaragua.

Informing ourselves

A major function of the Network is to share our knowledge of developments and to inform ourselves so that we can inform others. To this end, the Network has organised two national dayschools (Manchester 1987, London 1988). A Women's Network Newsletter is produced containing news from Nicaragua and de-

tails of women's solidarity work in Britain.

Efforts to keep up to date with the situation have been bolstered by close links with MIREN, a group of foreign women working in Nicaragua who send regular reports and newspaper clippings. The Network also keeps in close contact with AMNLAE, the Nicaraguan women's movement, and Nicaraguan women studying in Britain.

The Network in the NSC

The Women's Network is entitled to a representative on the NSC Executive Committee, who is elected annually by the Network. This has enabled the Network to influence more directly the NSC's priorities with the result that the *mainstream* of the Solidarity Campaign (and not just the Women's Network) devotes energy and resources to solidarity with women in Nicaragua.

How are we funded?

The Women's Network receives a budget from the NSC to cover postage and administration costs, the production of the *Newsletter*, and travel subsidies for women to attend Network meetings. One of the NSC office staff is responsible for liaising with the day-to-day servicing of the network. ●

If you are a woman who would like to be put on the NSC Women's Network mailing list and receive details of meetings and events, contact: Ros Cooper, NSC, 23 Beviden St, London N1 6BH.

← Women Co-operative workers near Mozonte

Some of the laws passed since 1979 which affect women

Fundamental Statute of rights and guarantees — declared equality for all and outlawed sex discrimination. This is now embodied in the Constitution.

Provisional media law — prohibits the use of images of women's bodies for commercial purposes (ie in advertising).

Prostitution — made a criminal offence in 1979.

Adoption law — it is now legal for single women to adopt fully.

Law regulating relations between mother, father and children

— abolished the old automatic status of the man as the head of the family.

— created equal rights over children for mother and father.

Paternity — an old law which enabled the state to force salaried fathers to pay maintenance for their children was

reformed to make it easier to enforce and expand its use.

Employment — laws passed establishing rights such as equal pay for equal work, two half-hour breaks a day for breastfeeding and 12 weeks maternity leave. It is forbidden for employers to dismiss women on account of their being pregnant.

Agrarian reform and co-operative laws, 1981 — these were the first laws in Latin America to recognise peasant women as having equal rights with men in relation to wages, access to land, and cooperative organisation. They were the first to define women as co-operative members and landowners in their own right, regardless of whether they were heads of household or had adult male children.

El Rama, badly affected by flooding after the hurricane, has been the scene of a massive recovery operation. Joan Smith joined a brigade of volunteers who went into El Rama as part of the clearing up operation in October and November. These are some of her impressions.

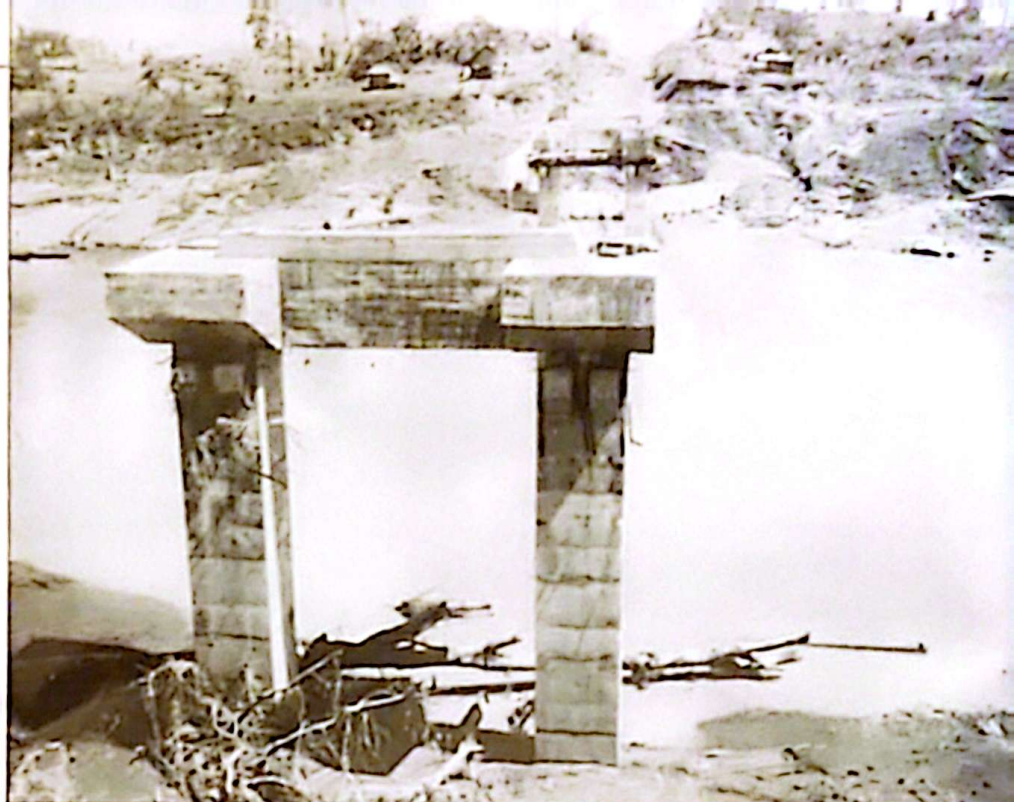
The road to El Rama is a beautiful part of Nicaragua. The wooded hills, small banana plantations, the villages — mainly houses made of wood with zinc roofs, are familiar and friendly — despite there being many contras in this area (this broken down road has always been a strategic target for them).

A devastated landscape

Suddenly the area adjacent to the road is not green but a brownish yellow colour. A banana plantation is lying broken and battered. There are very few trees standing and the few that remain are stripped of leaves — a very surreal sight in a country that has no 'autumn' or leafless season. A house has been dumped on the side of the road, carried up there by the flood waters. Other buildings are mud coloured, the water line evident at near roof level. Many roofs are without zinc sheets, some houses have crashed down.

Rama in ruins

On entering El Rama we were completely dumbstruck. What an indescribable mess! I should explain that three huge rivers converge just below El Rama — all leading to the Atlantic Ocean. The hurricane dragged along the ocean causing huge tidal waves which swept up the rivers to Rama. Every single building was hit by



One of the many bridges destroyed by the floods that followed the hurricane.

Hurricane update

Letter from Rama

floods 10-12 feet high, most were totally submerged and many have not survived at all. The floods of course, deposited mud and that's what we arrived to — a place of badly battered buildings and thousands of tons of mud.

We were allocated to a school — to clean it as well as stay there. In the course of cleaning one room it was possible to observe the damage done to the school. It is the least damaged of the few schools in

El Rama and includes primary and secondary — ie from 5 to 16 years. It's the small things that are the most moving — the doll's arm stuck in the wire mesh windows amongst a ton of debris, leaves, branches, paper and who knows what else, for it stank! The text books, exercise books, pencils, chalks, blackboards etc all ruined.

Then we went into the library. It was the best library I have seen anywhere in Nicaragua. The shelves were packed with water and mud swollen books which one had to remove with a crowbar. We saved what we could but they were few compared with the barrow loads that had to be dumped. Books on every subject taught in the school plus story books. There were even a few copies of 'Our Bodies Ourselves' in hardback, in English.

Miraculous survival

The most incredible thing is that not one single life was lost here. The floods of mud came at 11pm on the Saturday evening, a time when almost everyone except the defence patrols were in bed, and everyone managed to move up to the hills before the water was more than shoulder high. But every scrap of food, every water well, virtually every plant and tree were ruined. Only the coconut trees were strong and supple enough to withstand the onslaught. Not a building or house escaped damage, most houses are beyond repair and are being demolished. There is no electricity and there won't be for some time.

The rescue operation has been amazing. Every piece of heavy motor driven machinery that can aid the clean up operation is either here or in Bluefields.

Nicaragua Must Survive

Hurricane Appeal raises £170,000, Welsh Aid for Nicaragua £12,000

On 24 October, two days after Hurricane Joan struck Nicaragua, the NSC launched the NMS Hurricane Appeal. It called for donations which would be used to buy emergency supplies such as construction materials, clothing and medicine. It was also an appeal for political support, pointing out that Nicaragua is not just facing natural disaster but also the devastating effects of nine years of US economic and military aggression. The NSC national office placed advertisements in the national press, produced leaflets for distribution to affiliates and sent out press releases.

The response exceeded all expectations, with local solidarity groups in particular mobilising members and supporters. Other contributing groups include Labour Party branches, trade union branches, peace groups, Communist Party

branches, as well as individual affiliates and supporters. Part of the money has been used to buy and ship corrugated zinc roofing, medical supplies (collected by Nicaragua Health Fund groups), clothes, blankets and cooking utensils, sent to Nicaragua in four containers in November and December. The last container was a Welsh Aid for Nicaragua container with medicines, cooking utensils and corrugated zinc.

The balance of the money will be transferred to Nicaragua so that it can be used to buy corrugated zinc roofing which is in desperately short supply. As the Mayor of Bluefields Hennington Omier stated: 'There is a shortage of zinc in particular. We calculate for the whole region we need 350,000 large sheets of zinc — so far we have received only 150,000... as always the people's top priority is zinc'. ●

Teams of people clean out the houses and gardens, throwing rubbish onto the sides of roads, heaping bits of trees and soggy mattresses amidst piles of mud. Trees are cut into manageable sizes, branches cut down.

Picking up the pieces

Once houses are emptied, the owner, if he or she is around, decides whether it should be demolished and rebuilt or jacked up and repaired (most houses here were standing on stilts about three feet high). Demolition is quick and easy but not safe! Two people in the platoon I was working with had cuts and grazes on the head from flying bits of house! All wood is carefully put to one side for re-use. Then nails and hinges are carefully removed because these too are precious, scarce and therefore expensive items in Nicaragua.

Some good things have come out of the disaster: everyone is working together, people of different religions, different political stances, men and women; mostly young men but some older ones too. And now that the surrounding hills are considerably barer than before, it is said that the contras can't hide in them so easily.

The road to recovery

But how will this area recover — and how long will it take? Most, if not all the women and children return here soon from refuge in Managua. At least 30 of them will be living in this school as they will not have homes of their own for a while and families usually have between 6 and 10 children. The schools will not be operating until March at the earliest.

This is an agricultural community, it is now time to plant maize and beans and whatever else they grow, but the topsoil is now beneath inches of mud. Most trees have gone, and they provided fruits to supplement the diet of rice, beans and tortillas as well as giving much needed shade and, most important of all, to hold and gradually release water. Without these the town is more vulnerable to flooding than ever. And there is also a serious lack of grazing land for cattle and horses, when stocks have been replenished.

The music of life

The only music to be heard in El Rama is from a car with two enormous loud-speakers on top, used by two men who are responsible for communications in the town — the 'town criers'. They drive slowly up and down the streets telling us about meetings, about tasks, about when and where provisions will be distributed. But mainly they play music.

Today, as we were sitting wearily, sipping delicious tea and coffee after four hours non stop work, the car arrives at the school, the two men introduce themselves and return good humoured jibes; and then play such a lively selection of music that we find ourselves dancing for thirty minutes or more in boots so thick with mud that we can hardly lift them, but our energy is revived and off we go to work again. ●

Joan Smith

Nicaragua counts the cost

As more detailed damage reports have become available, a clear picture has emerged of the disaster which the hurricane represented for Nicaragua.

In December a United Nations team visited Nicaragua to quantify the damage. They calculated the overall cost of the hurricane to Nicaragua to be \$840 million. This represents approximately 40% of Nicaragua's Gross National Product — or 3½ years of export earnings. These are the detailed figures.

Population

231,562 people suffered serious loss of homes and belongings. 148 died, 100 are still missing and 184 were injured.

Housing

46,500 dwellings were affected and 23,200 were completely destroyed. Total losses \$296.6 million.

Health

Three hospitals, ten health centres and

Natural resources and environment

Large areas of forest and wood reserves were destroyed. The damage to the tropical rain forests has been described as an 'ecological disaster' which could take 30 years to reverse. About 500,000 hectares of forest were destroyed. Altogether 100,000 hectares of agricultural land was eroded and a further 800,000 hectares covered in sediment. Total cost \$162 million.



nineteen clinics were destroyed. Much medical equipment, medicine and vehicles were also damaged. Total costs \$44.2 million.

Devastation in the banana plantations — 40% destroyed.

Education

705 school establishments were either destroyed or damaged along with furniture and school supplies. Total cost \$6.4 million.

Agriculture

Serious damage was done to fishing and cattle industries as well as banana, cotton, rice, sugar cane and basic grain crops. 40% of the banana plantations were destroyed. Total cost \$80.6 million.

Industrial

Including fishing, wood, agro-industry, commerce and trade. Total cost \$53 million.

Infrastructure

600 Kilometres of main roads were damaged and 70km totally destroyed. A further 1,758km of access roads were affected. 28 Bridges were destroyed and a further 25 damaged. Telephone and telecommunication equipment, especially in Bluefields, was destroyed. The electricity supply system was severely affected. Total cost \$163 million.

Emergency services

The preventative measures taken by the government to safeguard lives, including the costs of moving, housing and feeding people, cost approximately \$28 million.

Responses to the hurricane

There can be little doubt that the mobilisation of the emergency services and evacuation of people from key areas by the Nicaraguan government was instrumental in preventing a greater loss of life. This limitation of casualties may have caused some people to underrate the scale of the disaster which hit Nicaragua. Certainly the level of international aid reaching Nicaragua after the hurricane, whilst substantial, was not nearly enough to deal with even the immediate damage caused by the storm. By early December around \$35 million of aid had been sent. The British government's response was miserly: they allocated a total of £260,000 — but by early January voluntary agencies in Britain had raised almost twice that amount, with the Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign's appeal alone standing at £170,000. ●

Chomsky's America

Professor of Linguistics at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Noam Chomsky is a lone iconoclast crying out in the wilderness against US barbarities worldwide. Through his vast works (books, pamphlets, talks), he replaces the American dream with the American nightmare.

In January, more than 1,200 people crammed into a meeting organised by the Cambridge Nicaragua Solidarity Group in the city's Guildhall to hear the academic-cum-activist talk on his familiar themes — US post-war imperial policy, focusing particularly on Central America, Vietnam and the responsibility of intellectuals.

As in his political writings, his talk was densely packed with detail, analysis and references to newspaper articles and government documents — all of them, whether 'dovish' or 'hawkish' ending up the butt of his irreverence and contempt.

Chomsky painted an almost uniformly bleak picture of the possibilities of radical opposition to US imperialism. On Central America, for instance, he said that in the late 1970s there were 'real prospects for change'. In El Salvador, self-help and church groups were emerging to challenge the dictatorship. In Nicaragua, the 1979 revolution that toppled Somoza seemed to offer a way out of the US butchery and domination for other parts of the world too.

But in Guatemala and El Salvador wars of genocide were launched against the people, funded by the US. Since the Esquipulas peace proposals had been signed, the murders, rapes and 'disappearances' had continued unabated. In Nicaragua, the contra war had forced the Sandinistas to cut back their welfare programmes.

'It is not obvious they will ever get out of the cataclysm,' he concluded on Central America.

At a press conference the following morning he was more optimistic. The intellectual climate within the US population, against great odds, had improved substantially since the mid-'60s when, he recalled,

student meetings against the Vietnam war had been violently broken up. Now such issues as feminism and ecology were on the mainstream political agenda.

Equally it was 'popular disruption' — small protest

population.'

On El Salvador, he said Reagan's claims that the Sandinistas had backed the guerillas with arms supplies were nonsense. The guerillas more likely received guns from the contra 'crooks', who would sell to anyone to gain money.

From 1980-83 a war of extermination was waged by the military against the people of El Salvador, in which thousands were killed. 'By 1983 the population was so

Turning to Guatemala, he said US military aid to the country was made illegal in 1977 because of its appalling human rights record. But for the next four years the aid continued at the same levels. 'They said it was all in the pipeline and planned. That was bullshit.'

After 1984, funding simply went through US client states such as Taiwan, Israel, Saudi Arabia and Belgium, 'a terror network no one dreamed of'. This provided no image



Noam Chomsky at the Cambridge meeting.

groups emerging spontaneously throughout the States — that had prevented Reagan from invading Nicaragua in 1981. That same 'popular disruption' had forced state terrorism underground — as the Contragate scandal had so dramatically revealed. 'A government whose warfare is driven underground is one which is afraid of its

traumatised that Bush actually went to El Salvador to tell the Christian Democrats to call off the slaughter. By then the trade unions and mass organisations had in any case been decapitated.' Then the bombing shifted to the countryside. It was, in fact, incredible that the guerillas were surviving at all, given the levels of US support for the Salvadorean military.

problem for the government and received no media coverage. Whilst the killings continued, the US elite was hailing 'the fantastic progress towards democracy' in Guatemala.

He ended with a rallying cry: 'The system is attempting to impose despair on people. But you must never give up hope.' ●

Richard Keeble

Prospects for peace

Esquipulas delayed again



Central American heads of state agreeing the Esquipulas II document.

Before Christmas it seemed as though the Esquipulas peace process, which had been faltering to the point of standstill in the preceding months, was set to be revived. But once again, hopes of progress were to recede as a presidential summit scheduled for January was cancelled, this time at the request of President Arias of Costa Rica.

During the autumn the principle block to the peace process had been Honduras, who were insisting that a summit could only be held if Nicaragua withdrew its suit against them in the World Court.

This, coupled with a demand from the other US clients in the region that they must wait for the outcome of the US presidential elections before agreeing to anything, meant that urgent discussions surrounding the nature of the verification procedures and the future of the peace process were put on ice, to the satisfaction of the United States.

But during November, and after the US elections, pressure for a summit grew. The Organisation of American States called on the Central Americans to revive the peace process, and particularly to set up verification mechanisms; the United Nations General Assembly made a similar appeal, as did the European Community and the Socialist International.

And so on 29 and 30 November, the foreign ministers of the five Central American states met in Mexico City and in an unexpected and important breakthrough called for a full presidential summit to be held on 15 January, exactly a year after they last met. It seemed that the international pressure, combined with the increasing regional crisis and the openings provided by the transition in the US administration, led to a growing preception of the need to push Esquipulas forward and for Honduran President Azcona to drop his demand regarding the World Court case.

At the same meeting, the foreign ministers sent a letter to UN Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar, requesting him to set up an international verification team, made up of representatives from West Germany, Spain and Canada, plus

the OAS Secretary General, and asking him to consider the various proposals put forward by Nicaragua, El Salvador, Honduras and Costa Rica, which all include suggestions for an international peace-keeping force to monitor the Honduran-Nicaraguan border.

Daniel Ortega warmly welcomed the move, saying: 'This is an historic moment for the region, and we must take advantage of it because it can slip through our fingers if we don't move quickly'.

Unfortunately this is just what happened. President Arias asked that the meeting be further postponed until George Bush had been inaugurated, a move which the Nicaraguans said could mean the death of the peace plan. As Daniel Ortega said: 'What a great irony it would be that President Arias, the great promoter of the peace plan, should now be the one to bury it'.

To date, a new meeting has not been fixed and prospects for progress look gloomy. President Duarte, already suffering from terminal cancer, will step down after the El Salvador elections in March; President Azcona is also facing elections this year; and the opposition struggles in El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala are stronger than ever.

Once again, the lesson behind the story is that it is the United States which controls the affairs of the region. Continual pressure to destroy the peace process, combined with client regimes who will not move until told to do so, had led to further delays, further bad feeling and further conflicts. Esquipulas is not beyond recall, but it will take a determined effort on the part of all the Central American countries to revive it.

Contra war continues to collapse

A top contra defector who took advantage of the Nicaraguan government's amnesty and has now returned to Managua has confirmed that the contra forces are in total disarray, riddled with corruption, and incapable of concerted military action. Horacio Arce, otherwise known as *Comandante Mercenario*, has stated that there are only 3,200 contras now based in

Honduras, with a few more operating inside Nicaragua: 'The majority is deserting, leaving everything. In Honduras there is nothing but intrigues and infighting, and the aid doesn't make it to the troops. It is sold along the way for huge profits... At this point all credibility has been lost.'

He also confirmed Honduran involvement in the contra effort: '[The Hondurans] give us the intelligence information we need. They give us the territory, they even give us storage facilities and training.' Arce, the FDN's Chief of Intelligence and responsible for coordination with the Honduran forces, is in a unique position to know.

Of course, George Bush could put a determined effort into rebuilding the demoralised and diminishing contras, but it seems more likely that his strategy will concentrate on more covert methods of destabilising the Sandinista government. The contras are not dead, and they can still inflict considerable harm on the border communities, but it looks as though their days are numbered. ●

Dave Kitson

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"Nicaragua Today"

REVIEWS

Letters from Nicaragua John Medcalf (CHIR, £2.50)

War with everything; with every dusk, behind every word, every hard-earned meal. War starved of the tang of novelty, fantasy or distance. This is what Father John Medcalf observed during his two years as a Catholic minister in the heart of rural Nicaragua struggling to overcome everyday terror. His brief was to offer spiritual and physical relief from a wound which has not been allowed to heal for ten years. So he harnessed the anger and grief of senseless contra murders to build libraries as well as dig trenches.

This slight book consists of open letters written monthly to his parish friends back in England. Sometimes Medcalf falls into the old sermonising technique of blowing a small observation into a universal philosophical truism, but like his parishioners he is never injured to violence. We can see him calmly getting on with his work in public, while privately railing at the inhuman manipulations of the US government.

All this is punctuated by the wide-eyed observations of a writer to a new, exotic country. Descriptions of flora and fauna (the jolt of beauty supplied by a rare butterfly) sit alongside the nuts and bolts of a survey on ecclesiastical

Sandinistas Dennis Gilbert (Basil Blackwell, h/bk £25)

Yet another odd book about the FSLN — and this one at £25 a copy. Dennis Gilbert sets himself the difficult task of analysing the FSLN, as a party which he acknowledges to be at the head of the most dynamic revolutionary processes of our time. He has gone about the task with obvious openness and seriousness: *Sandinistas* is extremely well documented and is a rich source of basic FSLN texts and policy statements. This alone makes it a valuable reference book. But Gilbert attempts to deal with the issue of democracy and Marxism which proves way beyond his scope. Indeed

Extracts from the book *Lovers and Comrades* — women's poetry from Central America, to be published by The Women's Press in March, price £3.95. To be reviewed in the next issue of *Nicaragua Today*.

We the Children of the Sun

We are the children of the sun are we,
who write in the shadows of the evening,
who walk in the dark of the night,
who arise in the light of dawn,
who go barefoot in the womb of the world,
who sow the field,
who grow the daily bread,
who know the language of the wind,
and are learning to fly on a bird's wing.

We are the people whose blood is of lagoons,
whose bodies simmer with volcanoes,
who see the rain fall on a parched land and on tired faces.

We are those who live the intensity of a look,
who plough the furrows of the old,
who bring the bones to bloom,
who consecrate bread in our own flesh,
who break chains and discover the way.

Michèle Najlis

In the New Country

Pain has been our challenge,
and the future our hope.
We build as though composing a poem:
writing, erasing, and creating anew.
Vidaluz Meneses

radicalism. The larger picture is present, but the book belongs to the doggedly courageous peasants, scratching a living from the hard ground under a cloud of violence and bereavement; we are constantly reminded of the elemental position of Catholicism in Nicaragua

nowhere does he suggest that a system different from the US could possibly be more democratic.

In his conclusion, Gilbert sums up the FSLN: 'Marxists materialists, they accept believers into their ranks... anti Yankee nationalists, they seek an accommodation with Washington.' It's as though anything less than sectarian dogmatism strikes Gilbert as a fudge. Is it not possible to reject the imperialism which has ravaged and pillaged the western hemisphere for two centuries, while still taking into account the existence of the world's most powerful military power, dare we say it, on Nicaragua's back doorstep?

His publishers do him no favours: The cover announces that 'Gilbert views the history

society.

Medcalf's eye for detail is often dramatic and even poetic (a boy shot dead attempting to retrieve a 100 cordoba note from a barbed wire fence, for example.) And his commitment shines through on every page. ●
Mark Brown

of the Sandinista Front as a succession of confrontations between its Marxist principles and Nicaraguan realities.' And there we all were, stupidly thinking that taking reality as a starting point was the most important principle of dialectical materialism.

Similarly, Gilbert pays a lot of attention to the concept of 'the vanguard party' without really getting anywhere. Talking of mass organisations he says 'and all preach the FSLN's political message to their members...' sloppy writing? slack thinking? Either way, it's a shame that Gilbert's studious research was not matched by serious analysis.

John Blevan

Brought to Light Alan Moore et al (Titan Books, £4.95)

Talking point of the moment is *Brought to Light*, the comic strip retelling of both the secret war of the CIA, including the Contragate scandal, and the story of the La Penca bombing when agents attempted to assassinate the renegade contra leader Eden Pastora. Though this act was blamed on the Sandinistas, it soon became evident that the bomb was planned by US interests.

The revival of the comic genre has been accompanied by a serious attempt to deal with complex issues. Of the new writers, Alan Moore is possibly the most well known for his revival of Batman as a cynical ageing vigilante. Other writers and artists involved include Joyce Barber, who co-authored 'Real War Stories', Thomas Yeates, who illustrated 'Swamp Thing', and Paul Mavrides, who works on 'The Fabulous Furry Freak Brothers'.
Jez Wallis

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FUNDRAISING NEWS

Since last we wrote Christmas fell like an avalanche with sales taking up more and more time. The gnomes in Sandino's Grotto started to develop that flinty stare usually associated with impending mutiny. Up on the bridge, as usual, we brushed up with the 'Captain Bligh guide to Industrial Relations'.

Seriously, and despite hassles with the system we use for the dispatch of goods, and some very serious problems with suppliers, the sales staff and volunteers managed to

Night for Nicaragua, which represented a major departure for NSC into a new musical form. The show featured Mike and Kate Westbrook and Chris Biscoe, Ronnie Scott and his band, Jabula, and Stan Tracey/Evan Parker. We were really pleased with the response to the show, and we are planning to organize a second jazz show later this year.

Already looming on the horizon is the bike ride from London to Oxford, set for Sunday 30 April. Once again the Monday is a bank holiday, so it promises to be a great weekend. Let's hope the weather is good. The actual logistics of this event are massive, and it is a daunting task. The focus this year will be on safety, riding technique, and basic bike maintenance and good fun!

From all of us in the engine room have a good new year in the Tenth year of the Nicaraguan Revolution! ●
Jes Wallis

Sandinista Splash

Sponsored swimming, raising plenty of money (over £3,000) and giving everyone involved a good time into the bargain, the Sandinista Splash was first held in London in 1988 (see *Nicaragua Today* no 33). The Camden Nicaragua Association which organised the 1988 Splash has now produced a briefing — to encourage other groups to try the same idea. It is hoped that as many as possible will organise their swims on 30 September 1989 so as to maximise national publicity. A leaflet about the Sandinista Splash is being sent to local groups. For more information please write to *Sandinista Splash*, c/o NSC office or contact Julia Mazza, Camden Nicaragua Association on 01 278 3796.



Sinead O'Connor at the NSC Xmas extravaganza.

get all the orders out, but it was a close run thing! Lessons have been learned and will be put into practice.

The other major effort just before Christmas was the Christmas Extravaganza starring Ben Elton, Sinead O'Connor, Jeremy Hardy, Jo Brand and Sensible Footwear, with special guest Atilla the Stockbroker. The show was a sell out, raising lots of money for the Hurricane Appeal and the NSC and, importantly, putting Nicaragua, and the Campaign, back into the public consciousness.

In January we staged a Jazz

Raffle results

Congratulations to the winners of our Christmas raffle. These are: first prize of a holiday in Nicaragua with Progressive Tours goes to Ruth McNamee of Thornton Heath; second prize of a portable colour TV goes to H Hagdon of Wallington; third prize of a crate of Nicaraguan beer, thanks to Tradenica of Brighton, goes to E Roberts of East London; and four bottles of Nicaraguan rum go to Ms Z Barnes of London, Martin Peake of Wolverhampton, Paul Sapslead of Brighton and Berni Collins of Hillingdon. Congratulations to you all!

Joe Public

Ain't it an amazing world when Ronald Reagan's appendix can get elected to do the most powerful job on the planet? The man whose campaign catchphrase was 'Read My Lips' (more to do with his mesmerising lack of coherency than his tax policies) finally stumbles flat on his face into The Oval Office and discovers the carpet has a higher IQ than the Vice-President. This column, of course, was present at the recent tastefully produced mega-inauguration party, along with fifteen thousand Elvis Presley imitators, an inflatable Adolfo Calero shaped basket-balloon and rather a lot of white-hooded people who were burning crucifixes. Seems the guys in white gear are the next US delegation to junket over to Moscow and lecture my dear old friend Mikhail Gorbachev about human rights back in the USSR.

Alone in a corner of the dancefloor, the aforementioned Vice-President Quail, the man who thinks naval exercises are something to do with Jane Fonda, was whistling the Battle Hymn of the Republic and trying to tie his shoelaces at the same time. I felt sorry for him. I mean it can't be easy being in public life when you talk like Kermit the Frog (unless of course you are Kermit the Frog).

Out on the White House lawn, in the PW Botha Beer Tent, I bumped into my old friends George and Tammy Bakker, the Scott and Charlene of the 'Born Against Christian' world. George was accompanied by his delightful twelve year Philipino niece, whose name he seemed to have some inexplicable difficulty in remembering. He and Tammy told me that Satan had tried to stop their recent return to Evangelical Television. Needless to say, Satan immediately rocketed in my estimation. Tammy's mascara was almost as thick as George's wallet, so in different ways they both looked like they had recently done ten rounds with Mike Tyson. The irredeemable sleaziness of this pair of obnoxious reprobates is only exceeded by their fabulous wealth. This proves nothing, except that there are a lot of breathtakingly stupid people in the USA and that George and Tammy aren't two of them. Sorry, neither are you Mister Tyson sir. You're not even one of them.

Phew! In retrospect, the most interesting thing about that well-known political failure and part-time 'Liberal' Michael Dukakis turned out to be his height. My friends in the American Institute of Public Administration (named after yours truly of course) tell me, and this is true, that had the useless dorkbrain been elected he would have been the seventh shortest US President in history at five feet eight inches. Only Presidents McKinley, Adams (both of them), Van Buren, Harrison and Madison were shorter than the diminutive Dukette. President George Herbert Walker Bush on the other hand is a veritable colossus, joint fourth tallest commander-in-chief of all time along with fellow six feet two inchers Roosevelt, Washington, and Arthur. (Who the hell was 'Arthur' I wonder, but no doubt you all know. He was the tall one). So you can see that obviously the Americans made the right decision. I mean, when the going gets tough you want a President who can tell outrageous lies to the US Congress without having to stand on a cardboard box to be seen.

Finally, glorious tidings reach us concerning Sinead O'Connor, woman of the people, friend of Nicaragua and Ireland's second most bald rock singer (after Bono). It seems that she of the smooth talk and the bristly scalp, having just appeared at NSC's pre-Christmas Hackney Empire bash, has now been nominated for a GRAMMY award. No connection between these two events of course. Ho ho ho. Let's just say this column had a word with a few well-placed friends. So now all you famous rockstars who read *Nic Today*, it can happen for you too. All you have to do is play one NSC gig and we can arrange for your name to appear in the Rock and Roll hall of fame. Call us now! Immortality beckons!! Read my Lips!! ●

AROUND THE COUNTRY

Aberdeen

The Aberdeen Solidarity with Latin America Movement staged a special Hurricane Appeal benefit at the city's Station Hotel. Local bands played to a packed hall and £500 was raised. Now the group is planning a further fundraiser in the form of a sponsored fancy dress pub crawl for the NMS Day of Action on 25 February.
Contact: Gwen Leiper, Aberdeen SLAM, 11g Rosemount Square, Aberdeen AB24UD.

Bath

The group has raised over £550 for the Hurricane Appeal from a Rumillajta concert, Club Sandino, bookstall and collections.

Contact: Bath Links with Nicaragua, 1 Anciliff Square, Avoncliff, Bradford on Avon BA15 2DH.

Bristol

BLINC has a good relationship with the City Council, which supported their Morazan Fiesta to celebrate the link with the Nicaraguan town. The programme included live music, theatre, films, a craft workshop and Nicaraguan meal.

Contact: BLINC, 84 Colston Street, Bristol, Avon BS1 5BB. Also in the area: Bristol SLAM, Elisabeth Jones, 47 Kingston Road, Southville, Bristol BS3.

Brighton

Due to the Brighton-Corn Island link there has been an enthusiastic response to the Hurricane Appeal. With the help of the Mayor, Brighton Council, local media and a big public meeting considerable funds have been collected. The link with Tipitapa is also being developed.

Contact: Andrea Jones, c/o Ox-fam, 189, Dyke Road, Hove BN3 1TL.

Cambridge

The group has been raising money for the hurricane appeal by street and pub collections and a benefit disco (over £700 raised). Work continues on the twinning project and the Chomsky lecture attracted 1,200 people from all over the country.

Contact: Veronica Speirs, Flat 6b, Castle Street, Cambridge OR Pippa Blockley, The Flat, Benet House, Mount Pleasant, Cambridge.

Durham

The Northern Region Nicaragua Hurricane Appeal (a liaison of supporting groups) has been raising awareness of the disaster and encouraging people to put pressure on the government to increase aid sent. The Durham group held a benefit showing of the film 'For Queen and Country', street collections and a Christmas social.

Contact: Durham Latin American Solidarity, S. Ruane, 26 Hill Crescent, Esh, Durham, County Durham DH17 9QX.

Exeter

This group was one of the first to publicise the Hurricane Appeal, using the local press and to good effect.

Contact: Den Perrin, 4 Home-field Road, Exeter EX1 2QS.

Faversham

The small but enthusiastic Faversham population was mobilised for the Hurricane Appeal and is still raising funds.

Contact: Gordon Sutton, 51 Church Road, Oare, Faversham, Kent ME13 0QA.

Lancaster

Lancaster held a benefit gig for the Hurricane Appeal using local bands: 'The Sheep are Nervous', 'Breakfast in Bed' and 'Kudum' — compelling names! Lancaster Club Sandino and educational meetings are now regular events, and the twinning programme with Matagalpa is building up strength despite difficulties.

Contact: Lancaster Central America Support Group, Dr Graham Jameson, 13 Sandown Road, Lancaster, Lancashire LA1 4LN.

Leeds

Leeds NSC and Twinning Group have raised over £200 for the Hurricane Appeal! The local press have been well used and the City Council was approached for support.

Contact: Leeds NSC/La Concha Twinning Project, Liohra Mul-lenders, 6 Harland Square, Leeds, West Yorks LS2 9EB.

Leicester

The Masaya Link group held some innovative events to raise money for the Hurricane Appeal — a Christmas work brigade cabaret and a music and poetry evening, as well as the good old dependable street collection. Five members have recently returned from Nicaragua and are keen to give slide shows.

The group has also recently played host to the assistant to the Mayor of Masaya and to the Marimba Band and Dance group from Masaya — this gave Leicester inhabitants a chance to experience Masayan folk culture over a whole week.

Contact: Leicester Masaya Link Group, 10a Bishop Street, Leicester LE1 6AE.

London

Croydon NSC are concentrating their efforts on enlisting the support of local ward Labour Parties and trade union branches using the

container appeal. Money and goods are being collected outside local DIY stores with some success.

Contact: Lucy Webber, 15 Fairholme Road, West Croydon, London CR0 3PG.

The Islington Group produced its own Hurricane Appeal leaflet and persuaded the council to publish it in the local paper which goes free to every home in the borough. Collections in the street and at a local theatre have proved successful even after Christmas.

Contact: Stella Lewis, 259 Sussex Way, London N19 4JD.

Liverpool

The Merseyside NMS link with Corinto is developing well since a member went to teach English in Leon and visits Corinto regularly. Exchanges have been set up between three schools and advice is being sought on the best materials and teaching resources to send. Links are being made with other twinned cities in Europe with the aim of supporting larger projects.

Contact: Merseyside NMS, c/o MTUCURC, 24 Hardman St, Liverpool L1. Also at the same address: Merseyside LASF.

Maldstone

The Hurricane Appeal has been well publicised, including by three young members as follows: 'Last week a big storm hit Nicaragua. In Bluefields only two houses are left standing. Last year the Mayor of Bluefields came to our house for supper. When we heard about the hurricane we decided to run around our block to raise money — please will you help us?' Jenny, Jeremy and Timothy, aged 11, 8 and 7, raised £75 and ran 6 miles — see cartoon. The group's link with an Atlantic Coast community in Managua is nearly finalised.

Contact: Maidstone Nicaragua Community Link, Peter Shore, 6 Penenden Heath Road, Maidstone, Kent ME14 2DE.

Manchester

Efforts to raise money for the Hurricane Appeals have naturally centred around supporting the twin sister city of Puerto Cabezas. The links group held a lively day of workshops and entertainment and Twin Sisters has held monthly educational meetings — funds raised are being used to send a woman on this year's study tour and to support a women's centre in Puerto Cabezas.

Contact: Manchester CASC, Jane Reynolds, 32 Churchill Street, Heaton Norris, Stockport, Greater Manchester.

Milton Keynes

The group is having a recruitment drive, in particular making contact

with a local college — Cranfield Institute. One member is working at Leon University and funds are being raised to help send a member on a coffee brigade.

Contact: Eileen Clifford, 43 Penryn Avenue, Fishermead, Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire.

Sheffield

The two groups have been putting pressure on the British government to increase aid to Nicaragua and have used the local press to publicise the hurricane. Booksales, street collections, a street event with stall and a talk by two Nicaraguan witnesses to the hurricane have kept awareness of the hurricane alive in Sheffield.

Contact: Sheffield Campaign for Latin America, Javier Farje, 54 Sturton Road, Sheffield 4.

Also in the area: Sheffield-Esteli Society, Mary Stead, Publicity Department, Town Hall, Sheffield, South Yorkshire S1 2HH.

Swindon

The Ocotal link group have collected over £800 for the Hurricane Appeal through pub collections, donations, the Rivendell Folk, a Christmas dinner and a cabaret. The group is also collecting school materials to be sent in a container.

Contact: Thamesdown Nicaragua Link Association, Brynn Matthews, Groundwell Farm, Crick-lade Road, Swindon, Wiltshire SN2 5AU.

Warwick

Over the last year the Warwick University group has raised considerable funds for the NMS container appeal and more gigs are planned for this year.

Contact: Bob Wilkinson, Warwick University Latin America Solidarity Group, Warwick University, Coventry CV4 7AL.

Wales

The Wales Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign have brought forward sending their container to Nicaragua in response to the Hurricane disaster. Welsh local groups have been collecting money for this. In Aberystwyth other events have included a coffee afternoon, talk about the Nueva Guinea project and a benefit concert.

Over the last year the Swansea group have held many successful events — public talks, video showings, press conference with local MPs and MEPs and a sponsored walk.

Contact: Wales NSC, Ann Delaney, 8 Alfred Street, Roath, Cardiff CF2 4TY.

CAMPAIGN NEWS

Ten Years of Freedom

19 July this year will mark the tenth anniversary of the Nicaraguan revolution. 'Ten Years of Freedom' is the theme which we are adopting for our campaign in the anniversary year. A special 10 Years of Freedom logo has been designed and will appear on a wide range of merchandise — including our best selling lines of T-shirts, mugs and posters, as well as new campaigning literature. The outline timetable for the anniversary year is given on page 2, and more detailed information will reach all NSC affiliates shortly; please do all you can to mobilise for these events, join in the fundraising efforts and help us shift our publications and merchandise in record quantities.

The Time for Peace Conference — originally planned for 21 January — had to be postponed and has been rescheduled for May. We are very sorry for any inconvenience caused by this postponement, which was due to difficulty in confirming speakers from abroad, especially Nicaragua in the wake of the hurricane.

Publications

An extensive range of new publications will appear during our Ten Years of Freedom campaign. There will be new or revised titles in the *Special Report* series, including 'Trade Unions', 'The European Connection', 'The Environment', 'Women', 'A History of US Aggression and Efforts for Peace', 'Hurricanes and Earthquakes — Nicaragua and El Salvador'. We shall also be preparing new material on the economic situation in Nicaragua.

There will be a new fold-out information and affiliation leaflet, and also a special 10 Years of Freedom campaigning leaflet. These items and some of the *Special Reports* will be included in a special Ten Years of Freedom pack — successor to the very popular *No Pasaran* pack. Our main book publishing venture will be 'Frontiers — women and Revolution in Nicaragua', which is being written by members of the NSC Women's Network. This is set for a Spring launch — in time for our main tenth anniversary events.

A day for Nicaragua

Work on the Nicaragua Must Survive Container Appeal continues with the Day of Action on 25 February. Local groups in different parts of the country are taking up the theme 'A Day for Nicaragua'. Activities planned include: donating a day's wages, sponsored tree planting, market stalls, collections of money and goods, benefits, sending postcards to Chris

Patten demanding increased aid to Nicaragua, and advertisements in national papers.

Conferences

In December, NSC had a presence at the National Union of Students' Conference in Blackpool. A stall was run and a good collection taken. In March we shall be attending the Democrats' second conference in the last six months and will be holding a fringe meeting there on 3 March.

Coffee brigades

This harvest season the NSC has sent four coffee brigades with 90 people in total. Three of the brigades were made up of people from England and Wales and the fourth was a Scottish brigade. The brigades have all worked for three weeks on state farms in the Matagalpa area in the north of Nicaragua, followed by a week's political programme of visits and talks. Most brigadistas will be back by the end of February and will be available to give slide shows and talks. Details from Helen Yuill at the NSC office.

Ex-CIA man visits Britain

In January, ex-CIA agent John Stockwell visited Britain for a week and spoke at very well attended public meetings in London, Sheffield and Leeds, as well as giving a press briefing at the NSC offices. John, who visited Britain in Summer 1988, when he was interviewed by *Nicaragua Today*, painted a vivid picture of the dirty tricks and illegal operations of the CIA over the years in many countries. He warned that with former CIA chief George Bush now in the White House, Nicaragua could expect further interference from this quarter as well as the possibility of further efforts to revive the contras.

The houses are full of smoke

This is the title of a compelling three hour documentary by US film director Alan Frankovich, which looks at the impact of US Central America policy on Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala.

A forty minutes extract from the film was shown to MPs and interested members of the public at the House of Commons recently, introduced by playwright Alan Pinter and followed by a talk from Alan Frankovich himself.

NSC Annual General Meeting

This year's AGM will be held on 22-23 April at Caxton House, London N19. AGM information is be-

ing sent to all NSC affiliated organisations and members, and we are looking forward to a good turnout in this very important year for the Campaign. If you have any queries about the AGM arrangements please contact Liz Sewell at the NSC office.

Nicaragua Today

The next issue will be a 10th Anniversary Special.

Trade unions

12 members from ten British and New Zealand trade unions returned from Nicaragua at the beginning of November having been there for two weeks with the NSC labour movement tour. A wide-ranging programme included staying in Jalapa with Nicaraguan families in the north of the Honduran border, visits to factories, state farms, hospitals, schools; meetings with Nicaraguan trade unions, the FSLN, AMNLAE, disabled combatants and the FMLN.

The tour also weathered Hurricane Joan in Managua as the capital battered down for the expected onslaught.

The response of our trade union affiliates to this natural disaster has been encouraging at all levels, reflecting a clear appreciation that such devastation cannot be divorced from the international economic and military battering Nicaragua has endured at the hands of the US government.

With the inflation rate estimate for 1988 reaching some 26,000%, the economy is in very poor shape.

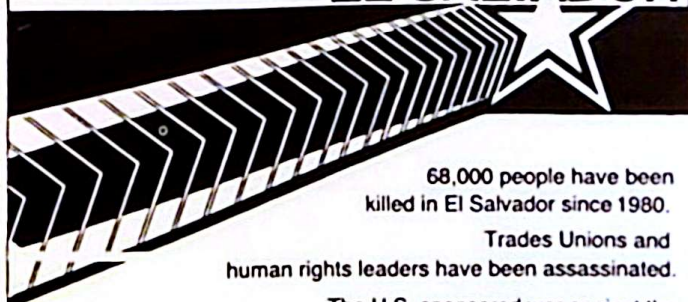
The leadership of the CST, *Central Sindicalista de Trabajadores*, (the largest union confederation) are attempting to reconcile pressures from their membership for wage increases, which the CST is nonetheless pursuing, with the wider responsibility for the survival of the revolution which is dependent on production being maintained at the highest level.

Despite this hardship, the example of these hard-pressed union members donating part of their wages to the hurricane relief effort is being used to promote our own Nicaragua Must Survive campaign Day of Action on 25th February. All our affiliates, sponsors, TU leaders and MPs included, are being urged to donate a day's wage to help Nicaragua to survive. This is, above all, an opportunity to raise political awareness about Nicaragua by bringing attention to their vital material needs and helping Nicaraguans to help themselves.

In this 10th Anniversary year of the revolution, it is very important to maintain Nicaragua's profile within the labour movement and to continue the pressure to further isolate the US government over its illegal policy of aggression. Write now to TU worker, Brian MacSweeney, for suggested 1989 resolutions to your branch, regional and national levels. ●

Members of the '88 labour movement tour are available for talks to branches and groups and can be booked through the NSC office. Make your enquiries now for the 1989 10th Anniversary labour movement tour.

EL SALVADOR



68,000 people have been killed in El Salvador since 1980.

Trades Unions and human rights leaders have been assassinated.

The U.S. sponsored war against the opposition is now in its eighth year.

BUT

The El Salvadorean people continue to fight for democracy and their legitimate rights despite incredible repression and intimidation.

THE PEOPLE OF EL SALVADOR NEED YOUR SUPPORT

Join the El Salvador Solidarity Campaign and work with us towards a free, democratic El Salvador and receive our quarterly bulletin which will keep you up to date about events in El Salvador and FMLN actions.

Affiliations: £10 Individuals, £3 Unwaged,

El Salvador Solidarity Campaign, 20/22 Compton Terrace, London N1 2UN. Tel. 01 704 9849



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